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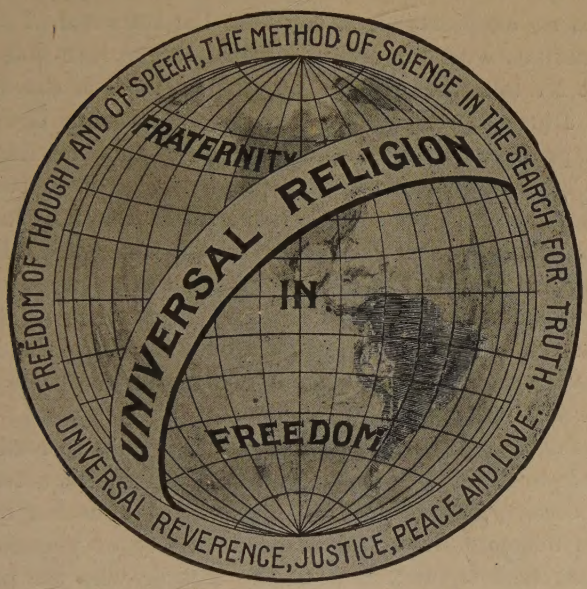

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PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

SAMUEL COLLYER (Treas.) ALICE C. VANRUYPER

EDITOR

ALFRED W. MARTIN, 409 NORTH E ST., TACOMA.

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EMERSON; THE MAN, HIS MINISTRY AND HIS GENIUS.

By Alfred W. Martin.

It is no exaggeration to say that the influence of Emerson is coterminous with the civilized world. The love and veneration felt for him has surely no parallel in modern times. Continental Europe furnishes the tribute of Hermann Grimm, the eminent professor at Berlin, who ranks Emerson with Gœthe, and of Count Pobiedonetszoff, not inaptly called "the Torquemada of the nineteenth century," yet the translator into Russian of the "Imitation of Christ" and a volume of Emerson's "Essays." Distinguished Hindus from Calcutta and Parsee preachers from Bombay alike acknowledge their debt of gratitude to Emerson, while Mr. Moncure Conway, of London, tells of a friendship he formed with a Buddhist scholar of Ceylon on the basis of their common love of Emerson.

As for England and America, we have only to read the report made by Arthur Stanley, dean of Westminster, after a visit to this country, in 1878. He had visited churches of many different denominations and heard a variety of preachers, but discovered that no matter what the sect or who the preacher, the sermon was invariably by Emerson. And into the Dean's own sermons the influence of Emerson had crept, as well as into those of many another distinguished contemporary divine in Great Britain.

Unlike that Persian prophet who described himself as "a free thinker, who belonged to the thousand sects." Emerson was a free thinker to whom the thousand sects belonged. Was there ever so remarkable a relationship? Here was a man whose radicalism was every whit as searching as that of the excommunicated Theodore Parker, whose utterances were fundamentally the same as those of Thomas Paine; a man who repudiated reliance on Biblical and all other external authorities, who

denied supernaturalism, smiled at miracles, dispensed with sacraments and yet not only does he escape martyrdom, but Methodists adjourn a religious meeting to visit his home in Concord, schools are named after him and a great university builds a memorial hall in his honor. Born in Boston, May 25th, 1803, Emerson had what Holmes said is the greatest of all possible advantages with which to be born, "a long line of New England ancestors of the best stock." Emerson's ran back on both sides to the generation of Winthrop and Brewster. He was, moreover, the fifth clergyman in direct succession bearing the name Emerson. In his veins there flowed eight generations of that culture, refinement, simplicity, piety and consecration which marked the New England ministry of the eighteenth century. These facts concerning the genealogy of Emerson help in some measure to explain those traits which are peculiarly associated in our minds with his personality, his serenity and poise, his etherealness and transparency, his sincerity and courage, and that shyness which was the transfiguration of his modesty.

No one can look at any of the later portraits of Emerson without perceiving that "the features are those of a scholar and a descendant of scholars," a privileged soul, enriched by spiritual inheritances and personal attainments. One sees, too, the expression of a reserve and sensitiveness that prohibit intimacy except with the sympathetic and understanding few. And this suggestion of the portrait, is borne out by the facts of his life. Emerson went through the world choosing the people who belonged to him. They who tried to force themselves into his charmed circle were quickly repulsed, they knew not why or how. Something in his manner, his speech or look told them they were not of his company and so they were forced back to interpret their treatment as best they could. If we were to classify the friendships of Emerson in the order of their closeness to his heart we should put Nature first, for in Nature, in the myriad manifestations of the Divine Energy, Emerson found the one friend, who invariably satisfied, never disappointed, always inspired. And next to Nature came books, and lastly, people.

After graduating from one of Boston's schools and from Harvard College and then from the private theological instruction of William Ellery Channing, Emerson entered the Unitarian ministry as assistant to Dr. Henry Ware, of the "Second Church" of Boston. Scarcely was he established in his profession when he began to doubt the wisdom and truth of his choice of a vocation. The duties of his office in many respects were such as to make him seriously doubt the possibility of his remaining in the ministry and in the church. The conservatism of the trustees and congregation called for the retention of rites and usages which seemed to Emerson to have lost their life and life-giving power. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the resignation in which his doubts culminated, was the result of anything but allegiance to principles of thought and action. The popular belief is that Emerson's inability to administer the "Lord's Supper" caused his withdrawal from the church and the ministry. But the truth is that this was only a surface manifestation of the real and underlying reason for the resigning of his charge. He had observed that the whole Christian church, including Unitarianism, was sunk in traditionalism, bound by dogma, tied to forms out of which the life had gone. Here, for example, was the custom of prayer at the Sunday services. A most excellent and helpful custom, thought Emerson, provided only that the prayers uttered express sentiments in harmony with the modern thought of God, and that they issue from a genuinely felt need of the soul. But to offer ancient prayers printed in a denominational prayerbook, regardless of their fitness for the modern spirit; to pledge oneself to pray, every Sunday, before the first hymn and after the second scripture reading, regardless of one's mood or preparedness, this to Emerson was the acme of insincerity. He wished liberty to pray when he felt like it and to be excused from offering expected prayer if the spirit did not move him. But no Unitarian church, though professing to proffer freedom, would grant so honest and rational a request. The churches of New England were steeped in traditional modes of thought and action, ossification

had set in and the sincere soul, eager to preserve the permanent in prayer and to be governed only by the tides of the spirit in his praying, found no favor in the sight of those he wished to serve.

The situation was precisely the same with reference to the rite of communion. Emerson had no more though of abolishing it than he had of dispensing with prayer. He simply said that as it was then maintained and administered the Lord's Supper was a hindrance rather than a help to the spiritual life. His wish was to hold a simple memorial service without any use being made of either bread or wine; to have a service of remembrance that would be instinct with life and meaning and inspiration. "It is my desire," he said, in his sermon on the subject, "to do nothing which I cannot do with my whole heart. Having said this I have said all. I have no hostility to this institution. I am only stating my want of sympathy with it."

To do more than frankly and quietly state his position was impossible. The serenity of his disposition forbade his becoming a controversialist. He had endeared himself to his congregation and they hated to let him go. But, as O. B. Frothingham said, "They had to decide to lose their minister rather than their supper." To them the Lord's Supper was a pledge of mystical union with their Christ. To neglect it was regarded as a reproach, to dispute its authority, as Emerson did, was considered contumacious; to declare it obsolete and a hindrance was to excite animosity and rebuke; to propose any modification of the observance was a desecration. Such was the attitude of both the congregation and trustees. It was simply another index of that backward look to form and dogma rather than the forward look to spirit and truth. And this it was that constituted the real reason for Emerson's resignation. His unwillingness to bind himself to pray regularly at specified times, and his refusal to administer the sacrament were thus not the causes of his surrendering his position but merely the focusing of attention upon the crucified principles of freedom and loyalty to the claims of the spirit.

It was the absence of these, the lack of opportunity as a

minister of an established church to be sincere, free and loyal to his own highest convictions, owing to the deplorable entrenchment of the church in the thought and practice of a bygone age, it was this that forced Emerson to withdraw from his church and his profession. He desired to be a *free*thinker, a free minister, a true radical, privileged to go to the roots of forms and rites, sentiments and beliefs, and drop whatever ceased to have meaning and value for the living present. The free thought for which he stood was at once reverent, affirmative, creative. In him there was none of that reliance on crude common sense with its cruder inferences which one so often sees in so-called "radical" circles. Nor again, was he given in any degree to the unfruitful task of showing up the errors and absurdities of outgrown beliefs. In an age of negations he was the supreme affirmative teacher. Holding not a single belief of orthodox Christianity as to the Bible, Jesus or the Church, he yet spent all his force on what is universally true and permanent concerning the Bible, Jesus and the Church. If it be possible so to state the most unwelcome truth as to make it irresistibly acceptable to any mind, then Emerson came nearer to that ideal than any other religious teacher we ever had.

At twenty-three Emerson entered the ministry, at twenty-nine he was out of it, out of all ecclesiastical affiliations and connections; alone, without wealth, without a clear conception of his mission, conscious only of the fact that he had a mission, must find it and fulfill it. So he leaves Boston and retires to Concord to find his dearest friend in the loveliness and charm and inspiration of that country town and its surroundings; to find also that his mission in the world is to live out, simply and quietly, his own inmost convictions and make them count for the utmost possible on the lecture platform and through the press. Here, in Concord, and in the same room in which Hawthorne wrote his "Mosses," Emerson wrote his first book, "Nature," published anonymously, but the reading public soon detected its author. In this essay Emerson made his most characteristic achievement. He developed the dawning idea of evolution (for Darwin had not yet bee heard from in 1836) into the religion

of nature, showing how, for the disproven conception of a mechanic manufacturing the world, there must be substituted the true idea of a divine life, flowing through all nature, inseparable, yet distinct from all that is, organizing all the variations of life, making for universal progress,

"Breathing in the thinker's creed,
Pulsing in the hero's blood,
Nerving simplest thought and deed,
Freshening time with truth and good."

Such was Emerson's doctrine of the "Over-Soul," by far the greatest of his teachings and representing an attitude to the world as great as it is true. With it was bound his gospel of self-reliance, for each human soul is but "a wave on a sea of soul" and reliance on this Over-Soul is the only real self-reliance. Here in this doctrine and its statement with endless repetitions yet ever varied, lies the genius of Emerson. Neither talent nor skill, nothing but genius could have produced his works. They are on a par with that drama of history with which Michael Angelo frescoed the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, with that transfiguration of motherhood which Raphael portrayed in the Dresden Madonna, with that critical moment of "the last supper" as interpreted by Lionardo on the wall of the refectory at Milan, with that revelation of ideal womanhood, unfolded in Browning's "Pompilia." In each case it is execution with freedom of spirit, freedom of thought, truth to nature, passion for truth. This is genius. Talent can copy and imitate, only genius can create and construct. That the world was slow to appreciate the genius of Emerson is not surprising. It has ever been so. First a crown of thorns, and later a wreath of laurel encircled the brow of Darwin in the field of science, of Garrison in the field of politics, of Browning in that of poetry, of Emerson in the field of religion.

Fortunately for the world the genius of Emerson has a time-proof vault in his works. They are as certain of immortality as those of Shakspere, and he will live on in them.

Inevitable it was that the serene aloofness, the ethereal shyness of Emerson should make it impossible for him clearly

and firmly to grasp the tragic phases and elements of human life, its heart-hungers and heart-aches, "the pain of finite hearts that yearn." On the other hand, the very reserve and remoteness made it possible for him to see through the actual to the ideal, enabled him to judge of men and things with singular dispassionateness and truth.

Unlike Carlyle, who viewed the battle of human life from within the thick of the fight, seeing it all dimly through the smoke and dust, Emerson contemplated the struggle from without, from on high, serenely beholding from his mountain-slope of contemplation the encounters of the contestants below. And precisely as Carlyle saw clearly and appreciated fully all the details of the conflict, its bitterness and pain and heart-rendings, yet wholly missing the message revealed to the observer on the mountain peak, so Emerson from the heights to which he had climbed missed sight of the tragic details, yet, as no other of his contemporaries, had a vision of the essential worth and certain outcome of the battle.

Matthew Arnold has described Emerson as "the friend and none other than the spirit of the great Emerson himself; the spirit none other than the spirit of the great Emerson himself, the spirit of oneness with the Over-Soul, the spirit of serenity and poise, the spirit of courage and loyalty, the spirit of trust; trust that "whatever it is that the great Providence has in store for us it must be something large and generous and in the great style of His works."

Charles Sumner, on his death bed, speaking of Emerson said, "He is the whitest soul of all." To that graceful and sincere tribute we all respond with a glad and grateful Amen.

EMERSON.

By Mrs. E. C. Kinney.

Like some old Titan of majestic height
His march has been with grand and solemn tread,
The brain profoundly working, while the head
Circled by mists, was often hid from sight,
Yet from its cloud, when great thought flashed to light,
That mighty brain by the elect was read.
The many saw not, turned away instead;
His brightness veiled to them was only night.
But, as he walked, anon on either side
Fell pregnant seeds of thought, which, being read
In minds long barren, showed the tender shoot
That later blossomed. Clouds might genius hide;
Yet everywhere the great man planted foot
His work remains, and shall through time abide.

REMINISCENCES OF EMERSON AT MONTREAL.

By C. J. Kershaw.

There was a society in Montreal called the Mercantile Library Association, founded and sustained by the merchants of Montreal, for the improvement and enjoyment of young men and, perhaps, more especially, their clerks. It not only had a fine library and excellent well appointed reading rooms, but part of its usefulness consisted in furnishing courses of lectures, for the improvement and amusement of the members as well as the public. The admittance fee to the lectures was generally 25 cents each lecture, and the officers of the association were limited to young men, who were clerks, and any going into business as principals, resigned and their places were filled again by clerks.

In the early 1850's, I was one of the directors, likewise on the lecture committee, acting as its corresponding secretary. In order to stir up new life and interest in the association, the

library committee decided to invite Ralph Waldo Emerson to give us a course of lectures. Correspondence was opened and his reply practically was, that his time was taken up for almost a year, but mentioning a certain week ahead, he said he could give us that one week, and he would give all the lectures we thought advisable during that week. Our reply was the week would suit and asking for his terms. He replied, stating them, which were very reasonable, and we accepted, asking him to arrive on the Saturday before the lecture week opened, and that we would meet him at St. Lambert, being the depot of the Vermont Central, across the river opposite Montreal, and as there were no railroad bridges then across the St. Lawrence river, communication was had by steamboat ferry in season of navigation and by sleighs when the ice bridge was formed in winter.

There was much opposition on the board to the engagement of Mr. Emerson, but as the library committee assumed the financial responsibility guaranteeing the library organization, the committee were allowed to go ahead. We at once advertised the lectures through the press liberally, as well as by getting out large placards, hired the largest hall in the city, put the price of admission to each lecture at 50 cents per night for six nights, beginning Monday and ending Saturday. The press and pulpits hearing of the proposed lectures expressed much opposition, owing to Mr. Emerson's advanced ideas on religious matters; but it only urged the library committee to greater efforts. On the Saturday Mr. Emerson was to arrive the season was such the ice bridge breaking up, mails and passengers had to cross the river in open boats, amid floating ice and rapid current, the St. Lawrence river there being some miles wide and at high spring stage of water. The committee duly reached St. Lambert, and was on hand to meet the train on arrival at the depot. None of us had ever seen Mr. Emerson, but we soon recognized him and got him into an open bateau and crossed safely through, amid much excitement and no little danger from floating masses of ice. We took him to the old Donegani Hotel, which enjoyed an excellent reputation as hotels then ranked, for its old fashioned and genial hospitality. Mr. Emerson evidently had a warm spot in his

heart for young men, and we were all very soon well acquainted. We dined with him and spent the evening, and such was his geniality and charm of manner that we became, before we separated for the night, his enthusiastic admirers. During the evening, after consulting with us, he decided on the six lectures we were to have the following week, selecting such as would be most pleasing to a Montreal audience. He was peculiarly able to do this, for during his visits to Great Britain he had come in contact with their brightest and most talented literary celebrities, and his experience, comments and anecdotes of so many distinguished persons as well as his shrewd observations of the traits and character of the British people, enabled him in his own rich and charming manner to do ample justice to the subjects under view. It is as well to mention here that the lectures proved to be the most popular ever held in Montreal, and the hall was crowded every night during the week. The audience at the completion of the last lecture passed unanimously resolutions thanking the eminent lecturer. The course thus ended with great eclat and the financial result to the association was a great success. On the Saturday night of his arrival, during the evening we spent with him and after listening to his talk on his lectures and deciding on what his lectures were to be the coming week, he invited the lecture committee to spend Sunday afternoon with him at the hotel, and he would read us his lecture on "Worship," which, of course, we accepted, and while we were not able fully to appreciate it, we did enjoy his manner and the Emersonian method of expressing the matter. Every moment we spent with Mr. Emerson we were still more fascinated, and, looking back and thinking of our enjoying all Mr. Emerson's spare hours during that Montreal visit as well as sitting with him on the platform during the lectures, one cannot well overestimate the enjoyment we derived or overvalue the singularly happy disposition Mr. Emerson must have had, knowing that he a mature man of the world of about 50 years of age, wonderful intellect and learning, and always associated with the best and brightest of mankind, did evidently exert himself to interest, amuse and

instruct the lecture committee of youths hardly 20 years of age on an average.

I met Mr. Emerson years afterwards in Boston by accident at the Revere House. He recollected me and referred with much pleasure to the time he spent in Montreal and in expressing himself as he did, it impressed me that his experience with the youthful enthusiastic lecture committee and the old fashioned quaint ways of Montreal had left an agreeable impression on him.

Though the lectures referred to above were given long before you, Mr. Martin, were born, you lived long enough in Montreal to appreciate the undertaking of the lecture committee in inducing Mr. Emerson to visit Montreal when he did.

The bulk of the inhabitants were of French descent and of course Roman Catholics; the English speaking portion were staunch Church of England, "Auld Kirk" Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, and were very "orthodox" in their sentiment, that to be even a Unitarian was unpopular. And to think that Emerson, who had once been a Unitarian was still further advanced, with new religious ideas, should be brought to lecture, was quite shocking to most people. But the enterprise of young Canada prevailed and not only did Emerson lecture, but had crowded audiences six nights in succession—which by the way, was taking a good deal out of Emerson.

EMERSON AT HIS BEST.*

By Alfred W. Martin.

In 1879 Emerson had said "Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet for then all things are at risk." Little did he dream that just such an event transpired when his own master-mind was given to the world. The very first sentence of the first book Emerson wrote, was a note of warning from a newly-released thinker. "The past generation beheld

*Part of a discourse delivered at the second of three "Emerson Centenary Services," Sunday, May 24th, 1903, in Tacoma and Seattle.

God face to face; why should not we too enjoy an original relation to the universe?"

The generation to which Emerson belonged was steeped in conservatism, trammeled by tradition, harassed by dogma, cramped and confined in creed, slavishly subservient to the authorities and standards of a bygone age. And so the great God let loose on the fifteenth of July, 1838, a thinker, thirty-five years old, to teach the world the duty of self-reliance, of independent thinking, the sin of settling on the lees of religion, the virtue of enjoying an original relation to the universe.

In that year, the daguerrotype was invented and the first sensitive plate was uncovered in Westminster Abbey on a midsummer day, producing a photograph of Queen Victoria and the royal court. Who does not wish that this initial experiment in photography had occurred at Cambridge instead of at London? For the greatest event of that year transpired at the Harvard Divinity School where Emerson delivered the annual address to the graduating class.

What an impressive picture that daguerrotype would have made! Behind the reading desk the slender figure and serene countenance of Emerson. Before him some twenty odd benches,—uncushioned pews in one of which I had my customary seat for four happy years. Occupying these benches were the seven graduates, a dozen students of the lower classes, the professors of the school and a few invited guests. Among these were Rev. Henry Ware, Jr., minister of the Second Church, to whom Emerson had served as assisant six years before; Theodore Parker, who had come from his church in Roxbury; Elizabeth Peabody and Dr. C. A. Bartol, who took special note of Emerson's prayer before the address, "a prayer with no pronouns in it" and consequently called no prayer at all by some dear old fashioned saints long since forgotten. The entire audience numbered scarcely sixty.

The world at large did not know the speaker at all. The few who did, knew him only as the young radical preacher who had been ousted from the Unitarian church, or, as the discoverer

of Carlyle, or as the author of "Good-Bye Proud World." But like Moses in the ancient legend, Emerson had met God in the bush, and had stood with his shoes off on holy ground and now he came to tell the students what he had heard.

It was an epoch-making address and though sixty-five years have elapsed since its delivery it has lost none of its freshness or fragrance. Nay, rather like a freshly plucked rose the perfume exhales from it still.

Here Emerson is at his best. Compare his complete works to a musical theme with variations and this address is the theme, experssed with a clearness, brilliancy and force unequalled in all its other forms. And the dominant note which recurs again and again is the lack of reality in the religion of his time, the want of self-reliance and independency of thought and action or the part of the preachers. The Divinity School address is a plea for the revival of genuine religion, for a return to first hand sources of information, for a restoration of reverence for the human mind and its power to perceive directly spiritual truth. It begins with a lyrical paragraph of rarest beauty, a prose poem on the beauty of Nature, written not only to enlist the sympathy of his hearers but also as a prelude to the higher strain of the beauty of the laws which make Nature's loveliness possible. And this again but leads to the still greater beauty of the mind which can comprehend those laws, while the greatest thing in mind, he continues, is the sentiment of virtue, the feeling of reverence and delight in the presence of the divine laws. This sentiment, moreover, is an intuition, an insight into the perfection of those laws and exerts a most powerful and uplifting influence on our spiritual nature. This fact was fully appreciated in the far east and though it reached its highest expression in Palestine, was not confined to that region. Then comes the central thought, the core, the heart of the address; the affirmation that this insight cannot be received at second hand. It is an intuition and as such cannot be imparted by another. "Truly it is not instruction, but provocation that I can receive from another soul. On his word or as his second, be he who he may, I can accept nothing."

Then follows an invitation to take a look at the second-handedness of contemporary religion, prefaced by a tribute to Jesus that is without a parallel in our literature. There are, he claims, two great defects visible in historical Christianity. One is "it dwells with noxious exaggeration upon the *person* of Jesus." But "the soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe." The other defect follows from the first. Men rely on revelation as though it were already complete and final, thereby dishonoring the God in themselves. They see that God spoke, not that He speaks. Then, to bring home to his hearers the truth of his contention concerning the deplorable condition of contemporary religion, he tells the story of his going to hear a certain preacher, who was so enslaved by traditionalism that church-going seemed a sin. Say what you will, he continues, the preaching of this country is traditional rather than spiritual, it comes out of the memory, not out of the soul. What, then, can be done, he asks in conclusion. As the church and the soul have been contrasted, let the remedy be found in the soul. "O, my friends, there are resources in us on which we have not drawn. Once leave your own knowledge of God and take secondary knowledge such as Fox's, Swendenborg's or St. Paul's, and you get wide from God with every year. Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone, to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men. Thank God for the Wesleys, the Oberlins, the saints and the prophets, but say, I also am a man."

To Theodore Parker this address was incarnate inspiration. Dr. Wm. Furness described it as "the fifth gospel." Channing after reading it remarked that there was nothing in it which he himself had not already entertained, but, he added, complainingly, "it is very hard to draw a long breath in Boston." To the dean of the Divinity School faculty the address was "Atheism." "The Philistines be upon us," said one of the professors. "The latest form of infidelity," cried another, while James Walker, president of the University, declared "this is neither good theology nor good sense." A controversy ensued inevitably, Emerson, of course, taking no part in it. In a letter

to Carlyle, he speaks of the controversy as "the storm in the Unitarian wash-bowl." When it had subsided Unitarianism had been advanced from the "Biblical" to the "Intuitional" stage of its evolution, with Emerson as the prophet and Parker the preacher of that advance. And though it involved the excommunication of both at the time, their position has since been outgrown and both are now honored in all Unitarian circles and extolled as apostles of the faith. *E pur si muove!*

RESPONSIVE READINGS.

From the Sacred Scriptures of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Selected for the "Centenary" Services of the Tacoma and Seattle Societies for Universal Religion.

Let us build altars to the Blessed Unity which holds Nature and souls in perfect solution and compels every atom to serve an universal end.

The mind that is parallel with the laws of Nature will be in the current of events and strong with their strength.

When a man lives with God his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn.

A man fails to make his place good in the world, unless he not only pays his debts, but also adds something to the common wealth.

"What has he done?" is the divine question which searches men, and transpierces every false reputation.

Nothing is beneath you if it is in the direction of your life; nothing is great or desirable if it is off from that.

We ask for long life, but 'tis deep life, or grand moments that signify. Let the measure of time be spiritual, not mechanical.

Every man's task is his life-preserver. The conviction that his work is dear to God, and cannot be spared, defends him.

As we are, so we do; and as we do, so is it done to us; we are the builders of our fortunes.

Courage with eyes, courage with conduct, self-possession at the cannon's mouth, cheerfulness in lonely adherence to the right is the endowment of elevated characters.

That only which we have within can we see without. If we meet no gods it is because we harbor none.

Great men are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force; that thoughts rule the world.

Of immortality the soul, when well employed, is incurious. All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.

Immortality will come to such as are fit for it and he who would be a great soul in the future must be a great soul now.

There is a soul at the center of Nature and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe.